40th Anniversary Newsletter

Club Founder - Graham Bell

Ring Ouzel

In this issue...

Forward
NNBC's 40th Anniversary page 2

In the News
When NNBC first started page 3

Early Days
More on the beginning page 4

Newsletter No 1
The very first Newsletter page 5

Early Newsletter Snips
Snips from No 2 and No 3 page 7

Founder's Retirement
Celebration in January 2015 page 8

Field Trips
Near and Far... page 9

40 years on
Still going strong, members, meetings, field trips page 11

Reflections
Contributions from new and long standing club members page 12

Epilogue
..and finally page 14

Forward

Today marks the date when, 40 years ago, the first proper meeting of the newly formed NNBC took place in Bamburgh Pavilion. The speaker was the founder and chairman, now President, Graham Bell. Ever the consummate ornithologist and teacher Graham's talk got to the heart of the matter for a new club with a talk titled "Starting Birdwatching". His enthusiasm and expertise got the club off to a flying start and we who have followed him have aimed to build on those first 30 years when Graham was Chairman, Programme Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Field trip organiser. It now takes several of us to fill those roles.

Through the 40 years the club has continued to enjoy a great variety of talks from eminent ornithologists such as Roy Dennis, and Professor Ian Newton, bird photographer Laurie Campbell, artists such as Darren Woodhead, sound recordists Geoff Sample and Chris Watson and personalities such as David Lindo. We are very fortunate in having many excellent birders in Northumberland who have shared their knowledge and experiences with us. With his many contacts, Graham set the high tone and quality which has been maintained over the years.

The first organised field trip was to the Washington Wildlife Centre at a cost of £2.70. Monthly field trips have continued and play an important part in the club's activities. They are not restricted to Northumberland however, and from the early days they have been as far afield as Spain and Bulgaria with Grantown on Spey, Yorkshire and Dumfries and Galloway. It is interesting to read that the first dawn chorus was at Howick – courtesy of Lord Howick? Now we are hosted by Lord Joicey – closer to "home".

Another aspect of the club, started in those early days, has been its participation in the wider community. At the time of the club's founding the Government of the day was considering Druridge Bay as a site for a nuclear power station. As well as that there was ongoing extraction of sand for the building industry. The club attended fund raising events and took part in the protests aimed at stopping these. There has been support for LIPU (Italian bird protection), Albatross protection from line fishing, Curlew projects in the UK and much closer to home, the hides that Charles Baker-Cresswell established at Spindlestone, Barn Owl projects and bird feeders at Bell View in Belford.

From the start, the club has been a very friendly one and our thanks go to the pioneers who introduced the refreshment break and to the volunteers who have worked behind the scenes, some for many years. This break gives members the opportunity to get to know each other and, as visiting speakers have commented, gives the club a "buzz".

So, it is good to look back to 40 years ago and to thank Graham and the early founders for starting a bird club which is still a thriving and active organisation today and - we hope - for many years to come.

Richard Poyer
Chairman
17 February 2024

Bamburgh man sets up Ornithologists' Club

Since moving to Bamburgh six years ago ornithologist David Bell and his family have identified no less than 160 species of birds within the confines of his garden.

So rich is the area in seabirds, garden birds and game birds that David Bell is forming a local Bird Club and would like to hear from anyone interested in joining.

He has been a keen bird-watcher all of his life and has founded similar clubs in Cleveland where he used to live including a World Wildlife Fund group and the Teesmouth Bird Club.

Mr. Bell was for many years a bird recorder for Northumberland, Durham and Cleveland and served on various county and national committees to do with bird identification and recording.

A preliminary meeting of the new club will be held in Bamburgh Pavilion on Tuesday, January 31 at 7.30 p.m., when absolute beginners as well as more knowledgeable observers will be made equally welcome. The only qualification, says Mr. Bell is an interest in birds and a desire to know more about them.

"I am sure we have the makings of a great club, socially and ornithologically and I hope a lot of people will join us," he said.

"Just what the club would involve is up to the preliminary meeting to decide, but I envisage an informal monthly meeting (on the third Tuesday of each month) in Bamburgh Pavilion. Probable activities include illustrated talks on bird identification and local bird spots, a monthly newsletter, and field excursions to places of interest."

Mr. Bell also tries his hand at drawing and photographing birds and has travelled widely in search of birds and other wildlife, sharing his interest with his wife Susan and two sons Julian and Adrian.

1984

THE CLUB HAS LIFT-OFF

THE CHAIRMAN and founder of the North Northumberland Bird Society, Mr. Graham Bell, at Friday night's meeting in the Pavilion at Bamburgh was able to show members a sparrow hawk which was the victim of overhead wires near Belford.

Clip and photo from Berwick Advertiser

Wow… it all started 40 years ago…

…Thanks to Graham Bell

The first proper meeting was on the 17th February 1984…

Early Days

Keen interest in new Bird Club

Mr Graham Bell, founder of the newly formed North Northumberland Bird Club shows how to identify birds at the very first meeting of the Club held in Bamburgh Pavilion on Friday.

The club was popular from day one...

Photo from Berwick Advertiser

Graham and NNBC were involved in the Druridge Bay protest...

Photo from Wikipedia

The Club: Why was it formed/how did it come about:
"Graham, always a keen birder, asked the RSPB if they would form a 'Local Members Group' in the far North East of Northumberland. The Northumberland and Tyneside Bird Club existed in Newcastle, but was too far for people from Berwick region to travel for an evening's talk. The RSPB's reply was negative, stating that there were insufficient RSPB members registered to warrant forming a local group.

Graham said they only needed a few keen members to start a group and it would fledge - but no!

So, he made the decision to form the North Northumberland Bird Club - it flourished and still does, ***thanks to your membership***".

Graham Bell

80+ people attended the first meeting...

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

NEWSLETTER NO. 1 FEBRUARY 1984

Dear Member/Prospective Member,

Well, the North Northumberland Bird Club is off the ground! With the help of the press and Radio Newcastle, the Club was launched at an inaugural meeting held in Bamburgh Pavilion on 31st January, and at least eighty people signed the attendance book. (There was no room for more signatures and undoubtedly more people were present.) Ages ranged from 7 to 85 and though most people were local, some came from Berwick, Alnwick and even one from Newcastle.

After a warm welcome and introduction, in which it was stressed that the Club is for anybody living in North Northumberland interested in birds - beginners and experts, young and old - suggestions and ideas were invited from the audience concerning the name of the Club, subscriptions, the day and time of meeting, the symbol of the Club and any other matter.

This was followed by a slide identification competition with prizes for those with the most (Peter Corkhill) and fewest (I'll spare her blushes!) correctly identified - again stressing that people of all stages of ornithological competence are equally welcome. Bird news was exchanged and a few recently found dead birds were shown - Little Auk, Black-Headed Gull, Ringed Plover, Woodcock and Brambling. The meeting ended with a raffle for the R.S.P.B.(won by Mary Souter and Billy Shiel), excellent refreshments provided by Susan Bell (her home-made flapjacks alone were worth coming to the meeting for, according to one junior member!) and an announcement of the next meeting for 17th February on the subject of "Starting Birdwatching".

A committee was chosen and met on 3rd and 16th February:

D.G. Bell (Chairman): Farne View, Bamburgh. Telephone 232
D.R. Childs (Meetings Secretary): 3 Farm Cottages, Easington Grange
J. Turnbull (Membership Secretary): 3 Newham Village, Chathill. Tel. 200
Mrs M. Armistead (Treasurer): 215 Main Street, North Sunderland, Tel. 720633
Mrs S.A. Bell (Refreshments): Farne View, Bamburgh. Telephone 232
Miss V. Dobson (Refreshments): The Bield, Seahouses 720517
Simon Rogerson (Junior Representative); St. Paul's Vicarage, North Sunderland.
Peter Corkhill

Minutes of the meetings are kept and are available for inspection by any member. Among decisions taken were:-

1. The Club to be called the North Northumberland Bird Club.
2. Membership to be £3 for 1984, £1.50 for schoolchildren, students, senior citizens, the retired and unemployed, and £5 for all members of a family receiving one newsletter between them; further reduction for those joining late in the year.
3. The Club's symbol to be a Lapwing (Pewit).
4. Meetings normally to be held on the third Friday of each month at 7.30 p.m. in Bamburgh Pavilion, except April, July and August (no meetings) and May and June (outdoor meetings).

The full year's programme is (subject to confirmation):-

February 17th	:	"Starting Birdwatching"
March 16th	:	"Know your Wildfowl"
March 25th	:	Visit to Washington Wildfowl Reserve (please book on form attached)
May 20th	:	Field meeting (bird song)
June 17th	:	Field Meeting (Farne Islands)

/September

September 21st	:	"Bird Migration"
October 19th	:	to be arranged
November 16th	:	A.G.M. and Members' Night
December 21st	:	Social

In addition, there will be other trips to places of interest

5. Non-member visitors are welcome at any meeting on payment of a donation.

6. No smoking in the main meeting room

7. A newsletter to be distributed to members at meetings and taken or posted to absent members.

Please remember (a) this is your club and your views and ideas are welcome - please contact any committee member, (b) to sign the attendance list at every meeting and (c) to tell others about the club.

We hope to see you on 16th March - please bring along a friend.

Yours sincerely,

GRAHAM BELL
(Chairman)

Graham Bell

Early newsletters featured some excellent illustrations, like this Stonechat…

Early Newsletter Snips

No 2

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

NEWSLETTER NO. 2 — MARCH 1984

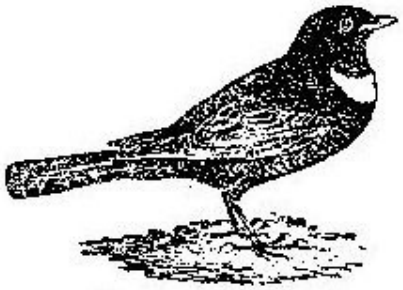
Dear Member,

There are so many different bits of news and announcements this month that it is probably clearer and more useful for future reference if I list them under headings, rather than try to write a letter as such.

1. The Meeting of 17th February: the first "proper" meeting of our club (i.e. after the inaugural meeting of 31st January) was again well attended, with over 80 people present and 50 joining. Bird news was announced (see below) and I showed the meeting a dead sparrow-hawk which had grievously injured itself by flying into a wire at Belford on 16th February. (A press photographer was present and a photo of this subsequently appeared in the Northumberland Gazette.) The minutes of the inaugural meeting were read and members were told that minutes of all meetings, including committee meetings, would be available for any member to see. The officers committee were introduced, but I must apologise for

3. Club Symbol: The club approved the idea of Ken Armistead that a Thomas Bewick engraving would be very appropriate and accepted his kind offer to prepare a suitable one for the printer, in preference to the previous idea of a lapwing. We finally settled on a ring ouzel, an easily recognised and typical upland Northumberland bird which also occurs on passage along the coast. Bewick (1753-1828) was a local wood engraver of wide acclaim, and the ring ouzel is one of his more natural-looking engravings and its clear, sharp outline makes a distinctive and appropriate symbol for our club.

No 3



NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND BIRD CLUB

Newsletter No. 3 — May, 1984.

Dear Member,

I hope you like our new headed newsletter sheets with the same Thomas Bewick engraving of a Ring Ouzel which adorns our membership card. Look out for it also on posters advertising club events. Many thanks to Ken Armistead and Simon Rogerson who dealt with the printing of it.

The Ring Ouzel logo has been used in newsletters ever since its first appearance in Newsletter No 3...

Founder's Retirement

Lord James Joicey who delivered an appreciation of Graham's Years as Founder and Chairman; Honorary President Graham Bell holding his retirement gift; Richard Poyer, newly elected Chairman of the North Northumberland Bird Club.

Over 60 members and friends gathered at the Mizen Head Hotel, Bamburgh on Friday 12th December for a Special Dinner held to mark the retirement of Graham Bell, Founder and Chairman of the North Northumberland Bird Club for 30 years- now our *Honorary President*. Proposing the toast to Graham, Lord Joicey, himself a long standing member of the Club, gave a humorous and sometimes teasing appreciation of Graham's work for the Club and his extensive knowledge of the subject about which he is so passionate.

Rosemary Skinner, a member of the Club since its inception, then presented Graham with a specially commissioned painting of Swallows by the renowned Scottish artist Darren Woodhead on behalf of the club members. Responding, Graham then gave a resume of his last 30 years as Chairman, reviewing the Club's important involvement in recording and submitting bird sightings, conservation, education as well as support for local and international Bird Charities and Organisations.

Explaining how he became fascinated with birds as a boy, he then gave a comical and accurate rendering of some of his repertoire of bird calls (to the delight of the assembled audience) - just one of his specialities! For several minutes the dining room was filled with bird calls ranging from the clucking of farmyard chickens to the evocative warbling of the Curlew; the unforgettable song of the Nightingale; the seven whistles of the Whimbrel plus the Grey Plover, to name but a few!

Summing up, Graham said one of his pleasures as Chairman was seeing how many new friendships were forged within the Club in an atmosphere of a shared interest in birds. Thanking members for their support over the years, he gave his assurance that he will continue to be a keen and active member of the Club, no doubt to the delight of members!

Drawing the evening to a close, New Chairman Richard Poyer reminded members that 2015 will be business as usual, starting with our next meeting on January 9th when the talk by Tom Cadwallender is appropriately entitled 'Birding in Retirement **'**!

Liz Harrison

Photo and text from January 2015 NNBC Newsletter 311

Despite being supported by a committee from the start it was Graham who acted as chairman, programme secretary, leader of field walks, and composer of newsletter until shortly before his retirement.

Field Trips…

One of the benefits of membership are the very enjoyable monthly field trips. Experts and amateurs alike each benefitting from the other

Holy Island Sept 1998

Dawn Chorus May 1999

Low Newton 2000

Harthope June 2004

Holy Island December 2023

Field Trips - Further Afield…

Cairngorms May 2012

Sometimes club trips have been a little further afield…

Isle of May - May 2016

Bulgaria - 2017

Extramadura, Spain - May 2019

Dumfries and Galloway - 2023

They mostly involve birding, eating and drinking…

… and having a great time!

2025 It's Catalonia !

Photos courtesy of Liz Harrison / Richard Poyer

40 Years On… still going strong

60 members and visitors attended the club meeting on Friday 9th Feb to hear a talk by David Steel titled "From Puffins to Penguins…"

20 members joined the field trip on Saturday 10th Feb, along the Coquet Estuary and on to Birling Carrs

Club Meetings

Unless otherwise informed, these are held the 2nd Friday of the month at 19:30 in the Bamburgh Pavilion. There are no meetings July and August.

Check out our Internet presence

On our web site at:
northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

On our Facebook page at:
www.facebook.com/NorthNorthumberlandBirdClub

Email us at:
ringouzel@northnorthumberlandbirdclub.co.uk

Members WhatsApp Group Chat
NNBC Chat (Join by requesting a link)

"Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?"- Sir David Attenborough

Reflections…

It is worth saying that I have particularly enjoyed my long-term membership of NNBC through the annual Dawn Chorus meetings on Ford & Etal. I have filed all the reports from the Dawn Choruses since 2002 and over that time I have made many friends whom we always welcome here – at any time of year. Their observations and sightings are always of value. **Lord James Joicey**

Congratulations to all the Bird club members who have kept the club running all these years. I became a member about the time a Hoopoe was seen in Ellingham. Graham Bell came out and we managed to find it behind the farm buildings at a gate way to the Golden Close field. **Michael Hall**

Unfortunately, my recollection of those early days of the Bird Club are now quite hazy. Naturally it is the memory of the field trips that come to mind.

I had been to the Farne Islands as a boy and my trip with the Bird Club brought back those feelings of awe as I looked over the cliffs on Staple Island. The plaintive cries of the kittiwakes, the grunting of the shags and the surge of the sea below echoed off the stacks of the Pinnacles to create a sound that was poignant and wild. As I think about it today, I feel tingling down my spine.

In more recent times our trip to the Isle of May stands out as a proper adventure. Wearing life jackets, we embarked on a Zodiac in North Berwick harbour and set off across the Firth of Forth to the island away in the distance. It held promise of isolation and mystery which did not disappoint. On the way back we diverted to the Bass Rock and circled round it. The gannets were packed so tight there seemed to be no space for any more and their smell drifted out to our boat.

A third trip that stands out is our visit to Bulgaria during the autumn migration. We hit lucky with the weather and we watched a continual procession of kites and eagles as they kettled high in the sky moving South. Red-backed shrikes were everywhere. For me probably the most vivid memory was the sheer number of red-footed falcons that were to be seen in Burgos and the surrounding countryside.

Peter Calder

Dead Birds: *It was advised that if you saw a dead bird that wasn't damaged just put in the freezer and bring it to the meeting. At the coffee break they'd be left on a table for all to see . In the early days +- 18 years ago, Graham didn't wear gloves, but then health and safety came along!*

Priscilla Simpson

We discovered the NNBC some 20 plus years ago on first moving to the area. What a revelation our first indoor meeting where we found a packed and steaming room of people enthusiastically sharing their bird news with a very welcoming Master of Ceremonies (Graham Bell back then). We thought this is lively and then were amazed as, with a magician's flourish, Graham produced a dead bird from a bin liner and proceeded to explain in fascinating detail the key points of its identity. Bird impersonations were to follow and we still hadn't got to the main event, the speaker for the night! Brilliant field trips, memorable stays in Granton-on-Spey and Goole, laughter mixed with friendly and informative birding; is it any wonder we were hooked? **Clair Ward**

Reflections…

We have been members for almost 20 years and have very many happy memories of the Bird Club. Here are a few that spring to mind:

- *a dawn chorus walk at Budle Bay and Spindlestone in the early 90's in which I learnt from Graham the importance of listening to songs and calls when identifying birds*
- *our 4 children came with us to meetings and they still talk today about Graham's famous 'ping-pong' game at the Christmas party*
- *pelagic trips to the Farnes in Billy Shiels boats*
- *Graham Bell and Lord Joicey laying on the floor of the Pavilion with their outstretched arms showing the wingspan of an albatross*
- *and of course there was always 'something in a plastic bag' for Graham to identify...*

Gerard and Helen Russell

"Among the longest standing members are Charles Baker-Cresswell, Peter Calder, Judy Glover, Neil Middlemiss, Rosemary Skinner and Graham Bell who all joined in 1985"

A few standout memories from me:

1. Chris Rose artist who has been a couple of times. The first time he had a meter square canvas and emulsion. He painted a bright blue puffin on rocks over the course of the evening which looked odd to say the least. By the end of the evening it looked wonderful and thought blue perfectly normal!

2. Algirdas Knystautas, a Russian ornithologist who came several times. He had a series on television at one point. He charged £1 per head and was paid usually £100! It was always a worry of overcrowding, the place was packed ! He spoke vey good English and always started with a joke.

3. In my early days at the bird club I always remember Graham doing a talk on Bird identification from which I/we learnt a lot. He did several of these over the years on different themes all with humour and demonstrations. All very educational.

4. The bird in a bag. Something that had an unfortunate end but gave you the opportunity to see closely anything from Gannets, birds of prey, Goldcrest and all things in-between!

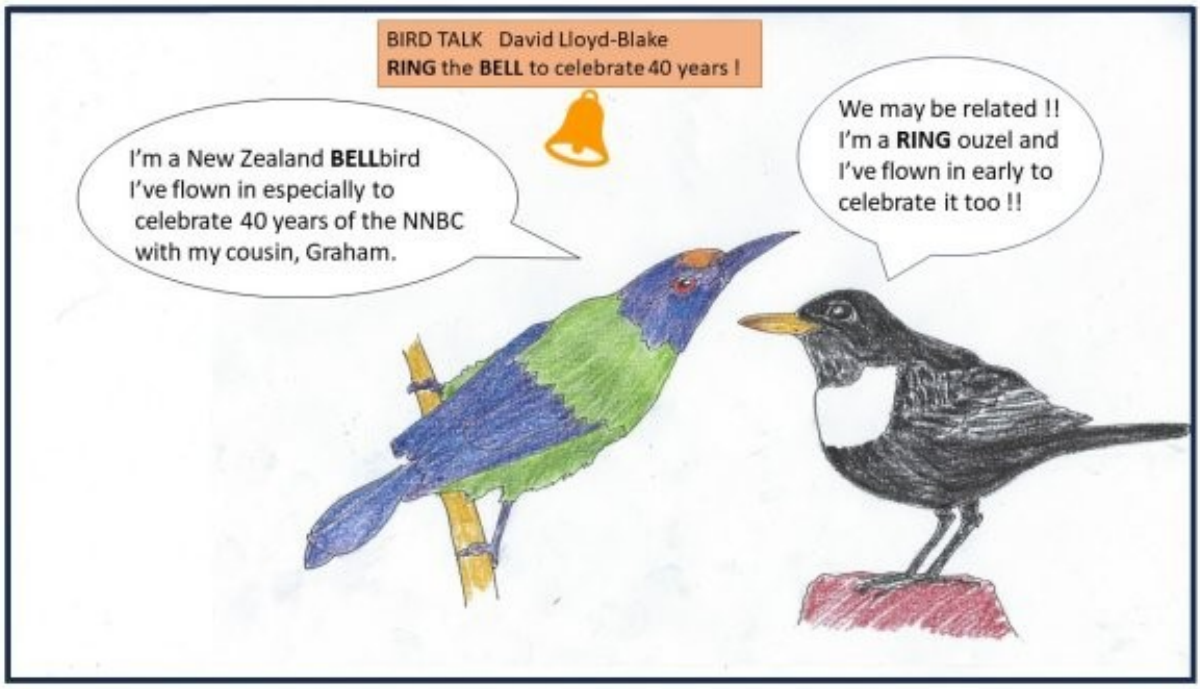
Fiona Southern

Explainer:

- For many years the December meeting comprised a shared/pooled finger buffet & quiz type entertainment.
- The *'ping-pong' game* was one of many entertainments accompanying the annual December meeting which was a shared buffet with bird games/quizzes (the ping-pong game involved naming the bird painted in the ping pong ball - there were more child members then!)
- '*Something in a plastic bag'*, in Graham's day as Founder Chairman, he would demonstrate and talk about a dead bird which people had brought to meetings - they were dead from a road kill or window strike, but in good condition. People would bring in the dead bird 'in a plastic bag', Graham would hold it up and give an educational talk about the species for a minute or two before the speaker began.

Rosemary Bell

Epilogue



Graham's Biography

NAME: Graham Bell
LENGTH: 73 ins (185 cm)
DESCRIPTION: Tall, lanky, glasses, rapidly losing hair (except on legs). Arms and legs bare in summer (to show off hairs?) but thicker plumage overall in winter

Crown: bare
Upperparts: hairy
Rump: very hairy
Underpart: not usually visible, but probably also very hairy
Belly: fairly flat (doesn't like beer – unusual for male of the species)
Legs: pinkish, long and very hairy

VOICE: Rather northern accent. No song, but wide variety of calls, and can whistle
SIMILAR SPECIES: None (thank goodness!)
BEHAVIOUR: Gait usually a steady walk with long stride, but can move fast over short distances (especially when rare birds appear) or slower over long distances (when exercising). Swims poorly, and only in hot summers. Can dive clumsily. Usually solitary, but often gregarious, especially at sea.
FOOD: Omnivorous, except for underdone eggs, pig's trotters, jellied eels and sheep's brains
HABITAT: Mainly coastal and marine, but also inland in woods, fields, gardens, hills; and round the margins of gravel-pits, lakes, estuaries and mudflats.
RANGE & STATUS: Worldwide, but basically resident in England. He has bred twice. Often winters abroad.

An extract from Graham's humorous bio of himself, which appeared at the end of a 50 page booklet Graham wrote and published in 1997, called 'Encounters with Birds' Courtesy of Rosemary Bell

Remember we will be celebrating our Ruby Anniversary on Saturday 18th May 2024… with a Lunchtime Buffet from 12 noon until 3:00pm

Look forward to seeing you there...